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the Multiflora Rose

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for Fences and Wildlife

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The Multiflora Rose for Fences and Wildlife

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LIVING fences of multiflora rose are rapidly becoming an accepted addition to the American farm landscape. More and more of them are being planted each year as farmers become acquainted with their advantages and as the supply of planting stock increases.

Multiflora rose living fences will keep your livestock at home and often will help keep your soil at home, too. A living fence of multiflora rose is the least expensive fence you can establish and the cheapest to maintain. Once established, it will last a lifetime.

Multiflora rose furnishes welcome cover for song birds, game birds, rabbits, and other kinds of farm wildlife. Compared with drab wire or wood fences, a living fence of multiflora rose is a thing of beauty. In the spring, it has masses of white blossoms (fig. 1). In the fall and winter its red fruits add color to the fields.

Multiflora rose is an Asiatic plant that has been used in this country for a long time as an ornamental. Rose growers often use it as a hardy rootstalk on which to bud other ornamental varieties of roses.

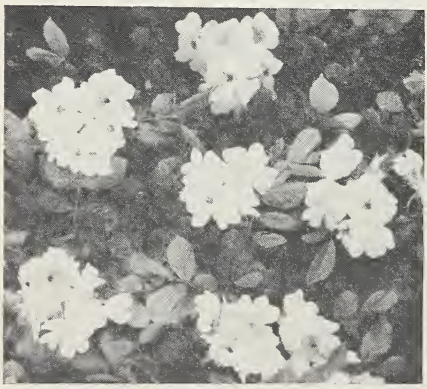


Figure 1.—Multiflora rose blossoms.

Its new use for soil conservation and erosion control has resulted from more than 15 years of trials and experiences by farmers working with the Soil Conservation Service and other conservation agencies.

On the best soils, multiflora rose reaches a maximum height of 10 feet and about the same width. Its growth is somewhat umbrellalike; canes shoot up 4 to 6 feet or more, then begin to droop, with the slender ends of the side canes hanging toward the ground.

Multiflora rose will bloom every year for 2 to 3 weeks, beginning in late April in the South and in early June in the North. Later the flowers will be followed by clusters of bright red berries which stay on the plant until displaced by new buds in the spring.

You should not confuse multiflora rose with hedges of Osage-orange. Unlike Osage-orange hedges, rose fences do not grow tall enough to shade adjacent farm crops or to require trimming. They do not have widespreading roots that reduce crop yields. Multiflora rose thorns are not long enough to puncture tractor tires.

The map on the back page shows the areas where multiflora rose can be used for conservation plantings.

Uses of Multiflora Rose

When fully developed, multiflora rose provides an excellent living fence for pastures where horses, cattle, sheep, and goats are grazed. It will also hold hogs that have been ringed (fig. 2). Once a living fence has been established, there is no need for posts or wire except at gates

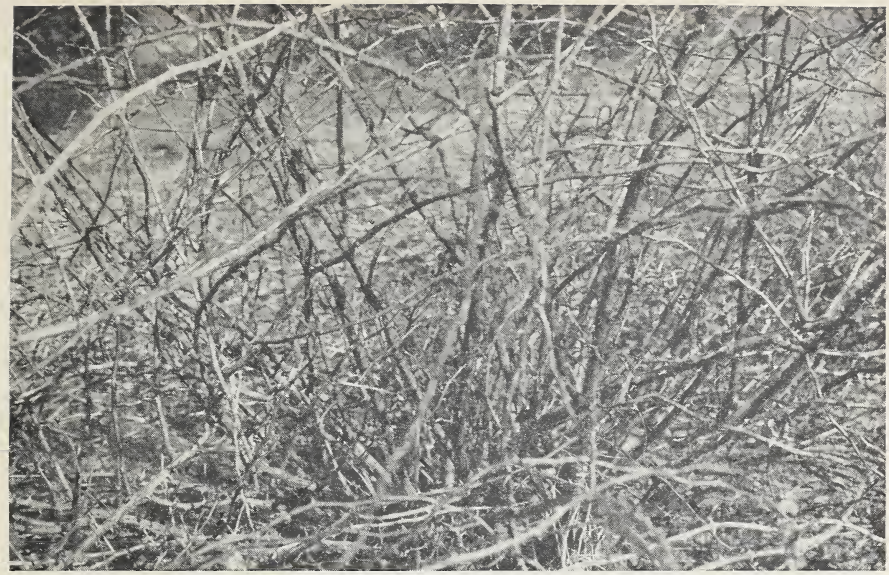


Figure 2.—This winter view of the dense thorny growth shows why multiflora rose fence will hold livestock.

and in a few places where plantings fail because of shade, poor soil, or excessive wetness.

You will find this plant suitable for contour fences between cropland and permanent pasture and between cropland fields used for rotational grazing. Living fences aid in better land use by keeping livestock from large gullies, eroding streambanks, farm-pond areas, woodlands, and other areas best suited for wildlife land. They may also be used to help prevent trespassing along property boundaries if a good planting site exists there.

Living fences are not recommended for small city lots because of the space they would occupy. Keeping them trimmed would be an endless job. On suburban lots larger than ½ acre they may be useful as a barrier at the rear of the lot only. On homesites of more than 4 acres, living fences may be acceptable on three sides of the lot.

The thorny, thick-growing canes of multiflora rose make useful cover for farm wildlife (fig. 3). The fruits of this rose are eaten by several kinds of game birds and song birds when other food is scarce. In the North it will meet the food requirements of pheasants during winter emergencies.

Farm game will benefit most where the rose is used to protect small areas of grass cover and plants that furnish their favorite foods. Its use as a living fence places it on parts of the farm where protective woody cover is usually scarce (fig. 4).

For woodland borders, multiflora rose should be planted in the outer rows where it will get plenty of sunlight—at least 20 feet from the edge of the woods. It is also being used in some places as the outer row in windbreaks.

Spreading of Multiflora Rose

Multiflora rose does not spread from rootstalks. Drooping side canes, if they touch exposed soil, may take root and grow. Ordinary care of adjacent ground by mowing, cultivating, or grazing will keep the rose planting from spreading by this method. Seeds will be carried by birds and scattered in waste places, in

Figure 3.—The thick, twiggy growth of multiflora rose canes provides nesting cover for song birds. The fruit furnishes emergency winter food.

woodlands, and along fences. Plants may spring up in these places after a few years. Ordinarily, this spread does not create a serious farm-management problem, but it may be troublesome if plantings are made close to abandoned crop fields or unimproved pastures.

Ordinary cultivation controls multiflora rose in cropland. In improved pastures, the normal management practices of mowing, grazing, fertilizing, and reseeding will control it. Spreading into woodlands does not create a problem because multiflora rose does not grow vigorously in shade.

The spreading of multiflora rose into idle or near-idle land is similar to that of blackberry, wild plum, black locust, sassafras, persimmon, and other vigorous native plants. Since multiflora rose does not grow from root suckers, it is as easily removed as any of the native shrubs—and more easily than many of them. Plants that do come up in unwanted places can be killed with herbicides containing 2,4,5–T.

Where To Plant

Multiflora rose grows best on moderately heavy or medium-textured soils that are well drained. It grows well on heavy, poorly drained soils if planted on a backfurrow to provide better drainage.

On light, droughty soils you need to make the most careful site preparation and planting. You also need to cultivate or mulch the plants in addition to using fertilizer. Do not expect to get living fences on badly eroded claypan soils, on sterile, droughty soils, or in places where the rose plants are shaded by trees.

What To Plant

For successful plantings you need healthy plants. Plants with a stem diameter of ⅛ to ¼ inch and with well-branched roots 6 to 9 inches long are ideal. You should cut off the tops before planting, leaving 3 to 4 inches above the root collar. This will produce more stems and a denser living fence.

This kind of stock is known in the nursery trade as 1-year seedlings. They have never been transplanted. Two-year-old plants are apt to be too large; but if they are of the recommended size, they will be satisfactory.

Be sure to use only thorny plants. Thornless plants should be discarded because they do not make good fence hedges or wildlife cover.

When To Plant

Since multiflora rose leafs out early, plant it as early in the spring as possible. Late fall plantings have been successful on light soils and on medium to moderately heavy soils when well mulched to prevent frost heaving.

How To Plant

Getting ready to plant.—Stake out the new fence line. If it is in sod, thoroughly disk a 6- to 8-foot strip along the staked line; then plow with a backfurrow in the middle and harrow again. You can prepare the site just before planting, but planting will be easier if you get the site ready the fall before (fig. 5).

Where you cannot plow a 6- to 8-foot strip, you can either remove the sod by scalping with a spade, or plow a single furrow. Since these methods will result in poorer survival and growth, use them only when necessary. Good site preparation is very important in getting high survival and growth; you cannot expect to develop a satisfactory living fence without it.

Planting method.—The best way to plant is to open a new furrow in the middle of the strip you have previously plowed and harrowed. Load the plants in a pail half full of water. They can then be carried easily and will not dry out.

Space the plants 12 to 24 inches apart. Place them so that the roots can be covered by throwing a second furrow into

Figure 4.—A hunter shooting at a cock pheasant flushed from a contour strip next to a multiflora rose hedge.

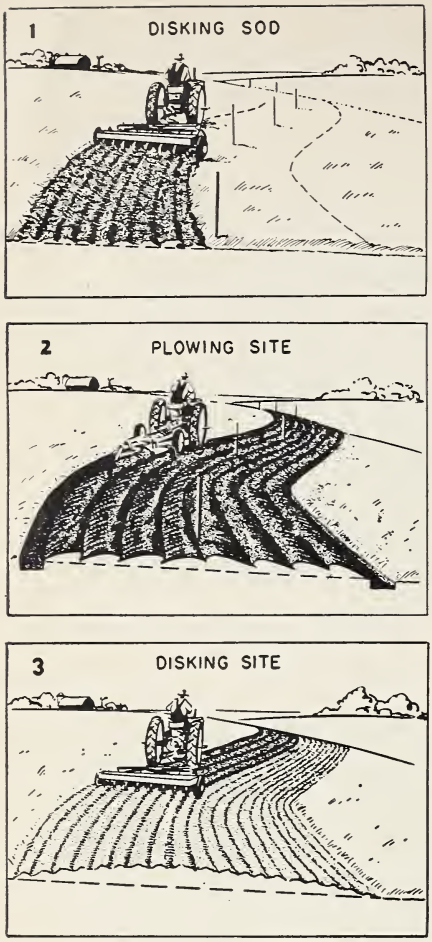


Figure 5.—Steps in getting ready to plant a multiflora rose hedge.

the first and so that the root collar will be at the ground surface. After you have placed 500 plants, cover the roots with another furrow. When all the plants are set, run the rear tractor wheel first on one side of the row and then on the other to pack the soil firmly (fig. 6).

If you use a two-bottom plow and have a helper, you can place the plants between the furrows. Operate the tractor at a low speed of about 1 mile per hour. The planter should walk behind the slice of the forward-cut furrow, placing the plants against the outside edge of the furrow and ahead of the back plowshare. The rear plowshare then throws dirt into the first furrow and against the row of placed seedlings.

Complete the planting by running the tractor wheel along the line of plants to set them firmly. This may also be done by foot tamping.

Transplanting machines, such as those used for setting tomato or tobacco plants or tree seedlings, are excellent for planting multiflora rose, but only if they are used on a well-prepared site. Even though these machines do the planting job in one operation, it is advisable to run along the planting line with the tractor wheel to press the soil firmly against the roots.

Hand planting is necessary where the site has been prepared by scalping or furrowing. You can use a mattock or planting bar. Be sure to (1) make the holes big enough to allow for root spreading, (2) set the plants at the right depth, and (3) pack the soil well around the roots.

In wildlife-cover plantings and windbreaks where the rose is not to be used for a fence, allow 3 to 4 feet between the plants.

How To Maintain the Planting

Do not risk disappointment in your living fence after going to all the trouble of getting the plants, preparing the site, and doing the planting. Follow through with good maintenance to get high survival and rapid growth. Here is what to do:

Cultivate.—Keep down weeds and grass on contour living fences by cultivating at least twice the first year and once the second year—or you can substitute mulch for cultivation.

Mulch.—Apply a good mulch immediately after planting living fences that run up and down the hill. Be sure to mulch all fall plantings to prevent frost heaving. For a good mulch, use at least 4 inches of straw, strawy manure, or

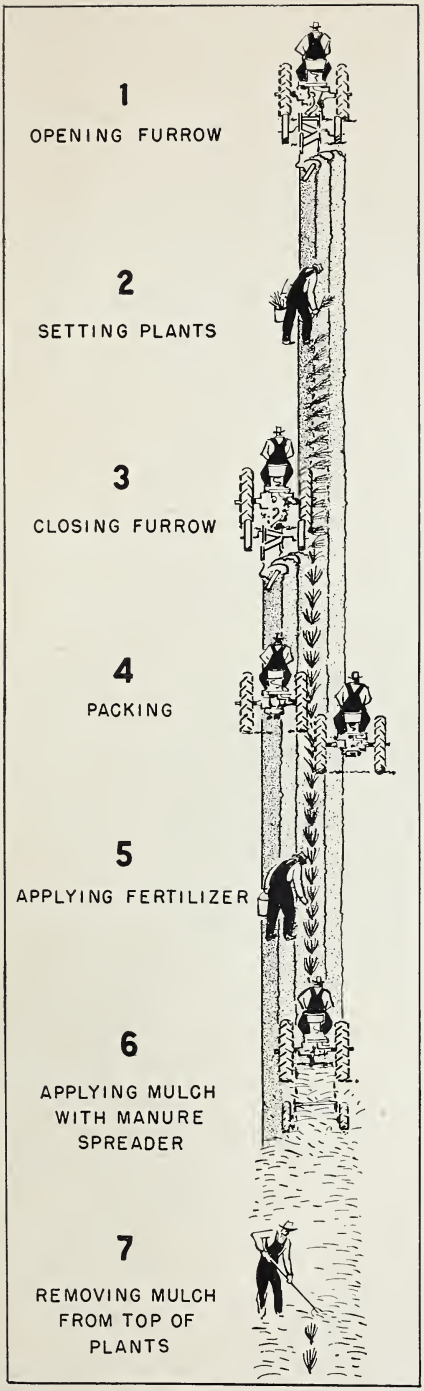


Figure 6.—Steps in planting a multiflora rose hedge.

whole corn cobs or at least 2 inches of sawdust, shavings, wood chips, or ground corn cobs. Cover the entire plowed area.

Fertilize.—Use 1 to 2 pounds of complete fertilizer, such as 3–12–12 or 5–10–5, for every rod of fence. It can be plowed down at the time of site preparation or applied as a side dressing before mulching. Repeat the application the second year and, if necessary, the third year.

High nitrogen fertilizers should be avoided; their use tends to increase winter injury and leaf spot disease and results in poor secondary branching.

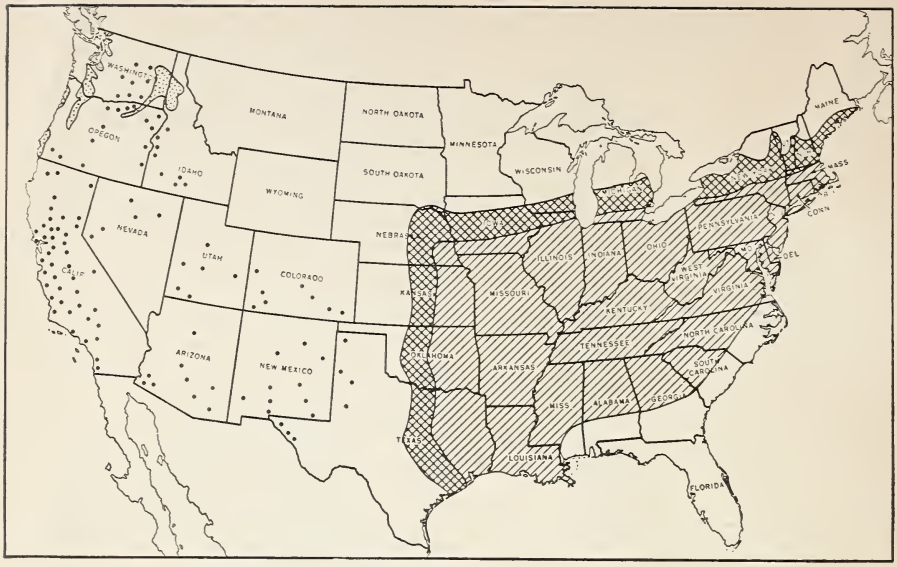
Protect from grazing.—For fast growth protect your rose fence from livestock until it is at least 36 inches high. You can grow a living fence without protection from grazing, but it takes about 2 years longer. It also requires extra effort to close gaps where livestock make paths through the hedge. A manure mulch applied at planting time reduces damage from browsing and trampling.

Replace losses.—Early in the second year replace plants that did not grow, especially if two or more in a line are missing. Where a new plant is needed, you can bend over a nearby stem and cover it with a shovelful of dirt, leaving the tip exposed. You can also replace losses by planting additional seedlings.

It is important to replace losses as soon as possible and to give the new plants a special treatment of additional fertilizer and mulch so that they can catch up with the rest of the planting.

Treat for uniform growth.—Because of soil variations you may have poorer growth where your living-fence planting crosses badly eroded areas and poorly drained spots or droughty spots. It is important to treat such areas with fertilizer or mulch, or cultivate them, during the second and third years, or until the poorer part of the planting reaches uniform height and density with the rest.

Remove competing plants.—Trees and shrubs that may shade out or smother the



Localities where multiflora rose can be used with success on irrigated land.

Areas where irrigation is desirable but not necessary for successful growth of multiflora rose.

Areas where multiflora rose will grow successfully.

Areas where multiflora rose will grow, but careful site selection and best cultural treatment are required to overcome climatic hazards.

hedge should be removed by cutting or by careful treatment with weedkillers containing 2,4,5–T.

Protect from weedkillers.—Be careful not to allow weedkilling sprays like 2,4–D or 2,4,5–T to drift onto living fences. 2,4–D sprays will injure the plants, and sprays containing 2,4,5–T will kill them.

Protect from fire.—Although burning usually does not kill the plants, it destroys the top growth and impairs the barrier effect for 1 or 2 years.

Where To Get Planting Stock

Multiflora rose seedlings are available in many States from State nurseries. Information about this source can often be obtained from your county agent, local soil conservation district, or from your State game and fish department.

Multiflora rose is also available from commercial nurseries. Watch the farm newspapers and magazines for advertisements. Be sure the plants you buy are of the thorny, upright variety.

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